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TAGS: MOPS MARR PGOV PREL PTER SY IZ
SUBJECT: APRIL 6 MCNS: BASRAH NEXT STEPS, SADR CITY
SECURITY, ELECTION PLANNING

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S REL AUS UK) SUMMARY: The April 6 session of the Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS) featured upbeat assessments of the result of the GoI security operation in Basra, along with agreement on the need for job creation, development, and humanitarian initiatives to stabilize the city. Discussion on Baghdad security centered on the challenge posed by Sadr's planned 9 April "million man march" in Sadr City, with participants agreeing to seek to contain rather than obstruct the march. The government and its security forces would continue to press hard against Iran-affiliated Special Groups while holding out an olive branch to mainstream Sadrist who eschewed violence. The military chief of staff said that a suspect taken in the kidnap-murder of Iraq's archbishop was a Syrian intelligence officer, which the Foreign Minister promised to raise with Damascus. An off-topic discussion of the budgetary needs of the Independent High Electoral Commission ended with a promise from the Deputy Prime Minister to arrange funding.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S REL AUS UK) In PM Maliki's absence, Deputy PM Barham Salih chaired the April 6 session of the Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS), opening the meeting by inviting Minister of State for National Security Shirwan al-Waeli to offer an assessment of the status of Basrah in the wake of Operation "Charge of the Knights."

¶3. (S REL AUS UK) QUIET IN BASRAH. Al-Waeli judged that Basrah was largely under control, thanks in part to support from tribal leaders who had supported the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and were now helping to organize for the peaceful development of the city. Al-Waeli said that creation of quick impact civilian jobs -- e.g. street cleaning, tree planting -- must be a priority to get some of Basrah's 25,000 unemployed off the streets. Al-Waeli cautioned against trying to bring the bulk of unemployed young men into the ISF precipitously, saying candidates need to be vetted. Meanwhile, some 6000 security volunteers (i.e. "Sons of Iraq) are working with ISF in the Basra area, including by working with MoD and MoI forces on assuring the peaceful operation of port facilities.

¶4. (S REL AUS UK) The Ministry of Interior representative echoed the general tone of satisfaction with the status of Basra. All Police senior leaders in Basrah had been reassigned, and the Major Crimes unit (which had drawn criticism for corruption and sectarianism) finally disbanded. The INIS reported that food, power, and medical services were stable in Basrah and that the Basrah Operations Center had effectively facilitated the movement of ambulances and supplies.

¶5. (S REL AUS UK) National Security Advisor Mowaffak Rubaie

declared that Charge of the Knights had been both a military and political victory. He seconded the call for a major civilian employment program, saying the PM had called on his government to spend \$100 million on jobs, services and humanitarian projects in Basra in a matter of weeks. Salih said that Safa al Safi, the acting Minister of Justice, would coordinate relief operations for Basrah. Finance Minister Bayan Jabr requested orders from the Cabinet and clear accounting of funds.

¶6. (S REL AUS UK) GEN Babakir Zebari, Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Armed Forces, offered his perspective, first grumbling that he had few sources of information in Basra since the Basra Operations Center reported directly to the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense rather than to him. He offered a brief appreciation of the contribution of Coalition Forces in support of the Basra operation (e.g. by helping transport supplies and providing air support) and praised the performance of some Iraqi units -- notably the 8th and 10th Iraqi Army Divisions for effectively clearing the lines of communication between Basra and Baghdad. He completed his brief with a province-by-province recitation of ISF casualties and enemy attacks the past two weeks, illustrating his point that security was largely improved after the flare-up surrounding the Basra operation.

¶7. (S REL AUS UK) STIRRINGS IN THE MIDDLE EUPHRATES. Along the Iranian border and in the Shi'a south, two hundred Iranian-backed JAM Special Groups (SG) continued to run operations. Diyala, Karbala, and Muthanna were relatively stable although some criminal elements were active. Al-Waezi closed by cautioning that heavy-handed ISF action during searches and raids were alienating citizens and driving some toward radicalism. The ISF should follow the Rules of

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Engagement that had been laid down in accordance with the rule of law.

¶8. (S REL AUS UK) TENSION IN BAGHDAD. Turning to Baghdad, al-Waezi said that security operations continue in Sadr City and other troubled neighborhoods, in which militia fighters are planting IEDs and attacking security forces. Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) supporters are intimidating Sadr City residents with GOI jobs -- or simply business with government institutions -- to prevent them from leaving the JAM-dominated zone. Some had been kidnapped and three citizens reportedly killed in this context. The next Sadr City challenge would come on April 9, when Sadrist had called for a "million man march" there, the Najaf local government having vetoed the original plan to march in that city.

¶9. (S REL AUS UK) Dr. Safa'a Rasul, Deputy National Security Advisor, commented that it is hard to draw a sharp line between mainstream JAM and SG members. Threats against GoI staff, for example, could emanate from either SGs or JAM members. Some of the latter were interested in peaceful resolution of their problems with the GoI; others were looking for confrontation.

¶10. (S REL AUS UK) Salih noted the consensus that Basrah was quiet -- although it could be the proverbial calm before the storm. Baghdad, however, remained dangerous. He offered condolences to MNSTC-I Commander LTG Dubik for MNSTC-I casualties in a rocket attack earlier in the day. The Deputy PM declared that the GoI would not tolerate criminal behavior from JAM-affiliated criminals, as the Political Committee on National Security had said in the just-released 15-point declaration (septel). The PM, Salih said, was committed to seeing the ISF clear and disarm Sadr City. The MoI rep commented that the PCNS declaration would likely result in an escalation of tension between the Special Groups and ISF. Minister al-Waezi said that Baghdadis and Basrawis wanted to rid themselves of the SG, but these groups used bribes and intimidation to radicalize mainstream JAM members and induce

them to fight against the GOI. Al-Waeli said it would be desirable to see the militias disarm, but asked rhetorically whether it was really possible for the GoI to clear and disarm Sadr City. How long would such an operation take?

¶11. (S REL AUS UK) IRAN IN THE SHADOWS. Foreign Minister Zebari noted that at the previous day's Presidential Council on National Security, all representatives present save the Sadrist had supported the PM's stance on the militias as encapsulated in the 15-point declaration. This was not a purely domestic matter and the Special Groups were not just disjointed gangs: they had an "international" (i.e., Iranian) dimension. Rubaie said that even the mainstream Sadrist had supported action against the Special Groups, and said the PM had declared that no parties would be permitted to participate in elections unless they divested themselves of their militia arms.

¶12. (S REL AUS UK) MNF-I Deputy Commanding General Lt.Gen. John Cooper said he agreed that Basrah was stable and shared concern over the planned 9 April Sadr City march. He requested the GoI to share its security plan for the march with MNF-I soon so that MNF-I could be prepared to assist. Salih concurred and noted that numerous ministries would be involved and must have a clear concept of their roles. Lt.Gen Cooper and Rubaie agreed that both the National Operations Center and Baghdad Operations Center would have roles to play. GEN Babakir added that even if the marchers predominantly intended no violence, a violent minority could be expected to try to hijack the event. He requested clear orders as to how the ISF should deploy on the route of march.

¶13. (S REL AUS UK) PROGRESS IN THE NORTH. GEN Babakir reported that, despite the distraction caused by the Basrah operation, progress continued in Ninevah and Diyala. ISF had found numerous major caches in Ninevah and, due to Coalition intelligence support, had freed 42 kidnapped students. In Diyala the ISF, Coalition Forces, and local government and tribal leaders were cooperating to bring peace to the province. Lt.Gen Cooper noted the importance of maintaining momentum on the fight in the north.

¶14. (S REL AUS UK) A SYRIAN SUSPECT. Babakir was pleased to announce that a suspect in the recent murder of Iraq's Archbishop had been detained. Babakir asserted that the suspect was a Syrian intelligence lieutenant colonel. Salih said the GoI would be sure to raise this with their "Syrian brothers."

¶15. (S REL AUS UK) OTHER BUSINESS: CASH TRANSPORT. Babakir
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said that nobody from the Central Bank of Iraq had shown up for scheduled MNF-I training related to the planned transfer of authority to the Bank of the responsibility for transporting cash shipments. Lt. Gen Cooper requested action to ensure the GOI and ISF were prepared to accept this authority on April 8 as planned.

¶16. (S REL AUS UK) OTHER BUSINESS: FUNDING ELECTIONS. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the budgetary needs of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC). The IHEC rep, Kerim al-Timimi, appealed for funding, saying the agency had not received the estimated \$25 million it needed now to prepare for parliamentary elections. The Finance Minister explained that it was not possible to fund the program until legislation had been passed authorizing said elections, but he would see what he could do when programming the upcoming supplemental budget. Al-Timimi requested an urgent loan instead; Salih said he would see to this in light of the importance of IHEC's work, and added that the GOI would work with the CoR, the UN, and other stakeholders to accelerate passage of elections legislation. Salih closed the meeting by saying the MCNS was the wrong venue for discussion of the IHEC budget and arranging for an appropriate follow-on meeting.

BUTENIS